

August 2014

The Newlywed

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THE NEWLYWED

A Thesis Presented

By

LAUREN E. KOHNE

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

May 2014

Department of Art, Architecture, and Art History

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ABSTRACT

THE NEWLYWED

MAY 2014

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This text is a written articulation of my M.F.A. Thesis show titled, *The Newlywed* wherein description of the work produced and my artistic process is present. This body of work is explored through a fictional character, a newlywed, who acts as an outlet for my recent experiences living in western Massachusetts. The sculptures are made up of collections of the everyday, mundane objects that surround me and that propel me to contemplate where they came from, and what their histories were. The objects then become instruments for the creation of new stories.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

She sees the fractions of her quiet life in her small, daily rituals, and in the artifacts that surround her; objects she lives with every day. And everyday they slowly lose a part of their original history and embody something entirely different; something that can only be explained through her record of experience and memory. She places the brown, cone-shaped, paper in the filter well that sits on top of the white ceramic cup and pours boiling water over the grinds. When the cup is full, she tosses the filter into the trash. She sits in her chair and drinks. When the cup is empty she places it into the sink to be cleaned for the next morning. Day after day, she performs the same routine. This mundane, and benign experience accumulates until one day she notices these movements she engages in, and the material she touches contain weight beyond the physical. She becomes aware that these things have been functioning for one purpose bringing to her now a sensation beyond her daily routine and outside of their intended purpose. They are small insignificant shadows, marking her passage through the world. Now, she can't throw away her coffee filter. Now, she holds her cup a little tighter. Now, when she sits in her chair she notices the presence of time. Her days become collections of memory, mutable, and filed without dates. Her awareness of time shifts and bends by the accumulation of objects rather than ticks of a clock. Like Perec's graveyard pens and Proust's scent of a madeleine, she enters an infinite dream.

What is experienced (empirically) in this exhibit is a strange celebration of the incidental. For these materials only become animate by the hand of her (invisible) psychological architecture, the Newlywed's own imagination. And so the gallery, too, will shift with her whims, as tension brews within it, between her memory archive and her effort to capture the present moment. By the minute her thoughts meander and jumble the artifacts of the room in her wake. Her youthful naiveté, coupled with (or against) her aged disappointment, gives the room its quality of heart, while warning the viewer that, though she may be wounded, it is her agency over these sculptures that brings them to life. Without her, they would be lifeless.

CHAPTER 2

Constructing a Character

The organizing principle in this exhibit is the newlywed, a fictional character. She is the assumed producer of this body of work and could be seen as a double of myself, or a separate but related entity, an avatar. This exercise of distancing has allowed me to meditate on my experiences inside the roles I play as an artist, as an inhabitant of New England, as a newlywed, and as a human being. I'm certain wherever I move from here (just as the places I've moved from); I will contemplate new evolutions of myself.

When I constructed this character the sculptures moved from being a private act of collecting and assembling to furnishing a voyeuristic, psychological space. My time in western Massachusetts and in this institution created, unwittingly, a framework for a character loosely based on myself. After extracting myself from California, I have never before lived in a place where the weather has forced me to spend so much time indoors, waiting. Waiting for the snow to stop. Waiting for the air to warm. Waiting for warmer seasons all while looking out onto empty, quiet streets.

I didn't know what this exhibit was going to be, because frankly, I don't know exactly who I am here. So I have been searching. I have been whiling. I have been reflecting and accumulating thoughts and stuff. Then transference seemed to take place. One by one these pieces, at first meaningless, or benign, slowly inherited the essence of my story and my experience. The newlywed was a way to draw a

thread through the formal, conceptual, personal, and contradictory aspects of this body of work.

Within the murkier subtext of the elements and structures I have created I can relate to finding comfort in subconscious expressions that resist easy explanation. My work, I hope, acknowledges the roles we play at a minimum and attempts to capture a period of time in which I played many. Artist Roni Horn, for example, uses multiple close up portraits of the same face to represent the slow and subtle shifting of place. In exploring close-ups of the vastness of the ocean as well as the intimate cracks and crevices of human skin, Horn insists she is passively (rather than actively) experiencing these elements, placing herself blissfully, like the newlywed, inside an entity both familiar and unknown.

CHAPTER 3

Collections

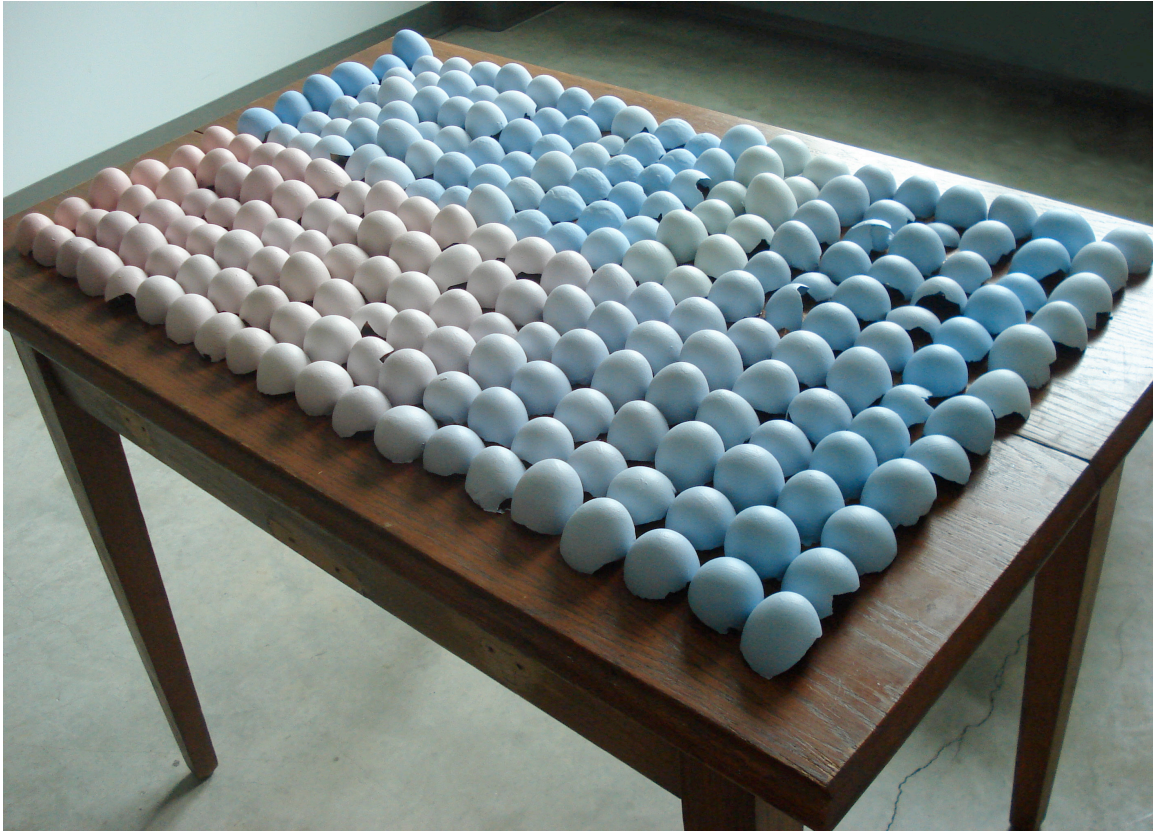


FIGURE 1: Lauren Kohn, *Whiling* 2014

Eggshell halves sit, jagged sides down and spread over an oak tabletop. The shells are encased in soft hues of pink and blue paint. They are placed into rows according to gentle variation in hue contrasted with the warm, wooden table. A chair is pushed out from the table and positioned slightly askew, as if someone has just left the scene. Together these elements make up, *Whiling*. *Whiling*, related to whittling, is an action intended only to pass the time. Ambiance enters through the soft color theme. Fragile eggshells also evoke

lightness. The table, however, is grounded, and heavy and unmoving. The chair, slightly turned out, is the buoy marking the point between daydream and reality.

A native Californian, I've panned hard and stashed my finds in my bedroom and in cars, in backpacks and garages and studios, and friends' houses, in various states for three years. And I've sourced randomly by name, not status; from friends, family, neighbors, thrift stores, dollar stores, fabric stores, curbside garbage, alley garbage, and the Internet, to name a few. My work is made up of a mosaic of objects culled from daily life. Whether purchased, found, handmade, or manipulated (sometimes to transform, sometimes to let be) account for my everyday, prosaic existence, not unlike the notches carved into a prisoner's wall. Paradoxically, I am also the evidence of time passing. However, I have come to accept that in my absence, whatever I have vandalized, altered, or defaced, may be all that, in the end, marks my time for me.

Fortunately, I have positive suspicions about essentialism, the belief that objects are imbued with an essence. However, my morbid side often wonders if malevolent essences do contaminate the physical world. This, after all, is the accepted belief of Shaman, another following I'm intrigued by. I have also wondered if there is an unseeable structure that might bring order and logic to what might be considered by some to be a chaotic and random universe.

In each transaction, between my hands and whatever material I choose to work with, an unspoken contract is agreed upon, and a transaction - made in confidence - is completed. I will work with you (the object), whether the apartment you were removed from was haunted, or harbored terrible secrets; I will work with

you if you were the source of pain; a cracked flower vase; if you were condemned to eternal purity, like crystal, I will promise to scuff you.

A lowly scavenger, I am, by extension, a speculative historian or (worse) interpreter of forgotten lives, armed with all the artifacts of mundane history forever adjusting and editing my archives. I wish to use my hands to elevate this junk into the contents of a personal diary. However, I am suspicious these choices could be seen, like souvenir collecting, as exercises in nostalgia, a sentiment that cannot be relied upon. Or choices motivated by feelings of guilt, or (worse) tenderness.

The Newlywed, like me, is centered in the belief that all flecks of dust, no matter how geologically (or otherwise) trivial, must be, laboriously accounted for in the final record: a futile task.

Mark Bradford uses found materials of (mostly) paper flyers from Los Angeles streets that he layers, and then re-layers, into large, abstract, map-like, colors on canvas. He states, "I take comfort in ... knowing that something came before me and something will come after me and that I'm just a part of it."¹ This kind of reverence for the everyday is not dissimilar from that of Rachel Whiteread, who observes her process of collection as "... a magpie of stuff that I just can't throw away" and an attempt "to preserve the everyday and give authority to some of the more forgotten things."² Likewise, my own process involves tracking and observing

¹ Bradford, Mark. "Process and Materials"; <http://www.pinocchioisonfire.org/>; Web

² Whiteread, Rachel. "www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEpnkNdYQ_0"; www.youtube.com; last updated, 2012; Web.

my movements throughout each day by gathering remnants of things I come into contact with. And similar to Whiteread, I find I develop attachments to certain things “I can’t throw away.” And so elements I typically would leave behind, for reasons I cannot predict, I end up holding on to.

The accumulation of these scraps echo where I have been, and where I may go, and as they build they round into an ever present cacophony, reminding me, in the words of Bradford, we are less than, “just a part of it”; rather, we resemble the smudge left by an oily finger. My work attempts, in small ways, to elevate this “smudge” into something less forgettable.



FIGURE 2: Rachel Whiteread, *Vitrine Objects* circa 2000

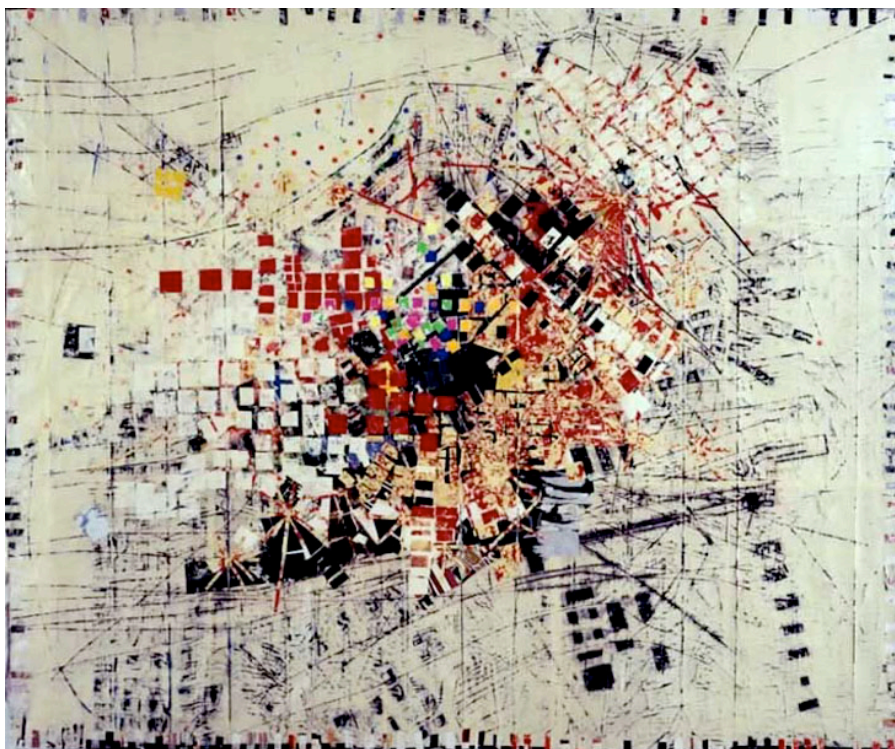


FIGURE 3: Mark Bradford, *Kryptonite* 2006

As mentioned, I have, over the years, accumulated my own archive. The more time I spend with it, the more I have become aware that objects of the material world are my only armor against forgetting. If there is one constant in life, it is that memory is confronted by inexhaustible forces of erosion. This endeavor to archive memory can be exhausting and may prove ultimately futile, but that does not mean it is a meaningless or useless endeavor. We need our things if we are to remember. We need our things to be remembered. We need our things to cope with those who have lost their memories. So this is my small part, in preserving some remote essences, even if the resulting work is warped, inexact, or in the nadir of its deterioration.

Pierre Nora acknowledges that the connection between memory and material is common: “Modern memory is, above all, archival,” he says. “It relies

entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image.”³

The Newlywed, in her own way, has discovered her breath in her own, terminal, memory-archive. And while for Nora, memory is a final, and a near virginal idealization of history, The Newlywed’s ordeal is more fluid, and she has yet to reach her final memory point. The gallery today will mark her place, but only for today.

³ Nora, Pierre. “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire.” *Representations*, no. 26 The Regents of the University of California, 1989, p. 13

CHAPTER 4

Everydayness

"I remembered it was Sunday ... I fried some eggs and ate them off the pan. I did without bread as there wasn't any left, and I couldn't be bothered going down to buy it ... A bit later, for want of anything better to do, I picked up an old newspaper that was lying on the floor and read it. There was an advertisement for Kruschen Salts and I cut it out and pasted it into an album where I keep things that amuse me in the papers ... I went back to the room, got a tablet of chocolate, and returned to the window to eat it. Soon after the sky clouded over and I thought a summer storm was coming. However, it gradually lifted. All the same, (the clouds) had left in the street a sort of threat of rain, which made it darker. I stayed watching the sky for quite a while."⁴

Albert Camus writes this passage in his novel, *The Stranger*. Speaking through the eyes of M. Meursault, a character who allows himself to move through objects, people and places. A man who lives simply, observing every detail and sensation that passes through him. He is continually caught inside recurring thoughts yet he is no more than a part of the material of his environment.

The visual impressions and experiences I have had growing up have shaped how I see the world today and contribute to (subconsciously or not) the work I choose to make. Like M. Meursault, who observes his world washing over him, the world I perceive around me is similarly banal, though it is one filled with color. Until recently, I had no idea there could be a reasonable explanation why every letter of the alphabet appeared imbued with a specific color. Synesthesia is a condition where the senses crisscross in the brain. Colors exude from letters every

⁴ Camus, Albert. "The Stranger." Trans. Stuart Gilbert. Vintage Books, New York, 1946. p.25-27

time I am faced with text. This experience occurs every day; multiple times a day; anytime I see a letter. And while these visions may seem arbitrary, they make perfect sense, at least intrinsically, even though, to others, there is nothing to be seen. From a young age, this sensitivity taught me the world is, quite literally, not black and white, and it steered me toward investigating the possibility of alternate realities through, for example, sewn coffee filters, hanging keys, a field of cups and painted eggshells, to name a few.

“It has nothing to do with artifice or technique. It has nothing to do with aesthetics or conception. It has only to do with the act of correct observation, and by that I mean a physical contact with all sorts of objects through all the senses.”⁵

While the artist Kimon Nicolaides asserts that the ability to keenly observe through all of the senses is essential to “correct” interpretations and translations of our surrounding world, how the senses construe can be unique to each beholder. Holding an apple, I feel its smooth, outer contours, smell sweetness from under its skin, and see its rich glossy warm colors. Often, it is a material’s tactile quality that invites a desire to translate these natural and man made things into a more esoteric, uncommon language or mode of subconscious communication.

From night-lit swimming pools, 1950’s era lamps, my grandfather’s saturated paintings and the unusual relics from his business trips abroad, to hundreds of rides across the Bay Bridge: its yawning vertical slopes. The city grids

⁵ Nicolaides, Kimon. “The Natural Way to Draw.” Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, MA. 1941 p. xiii

of San Francisco; its painted patchwork buildings, ornately designed homes, and grimy streets. Similar shapes, patterns, and materials influence the way I absorb cities like Los Angeles and New York City, and in rural areas such as western Massachusetts. But it's not only my surroundings I remember so well. It is also the memory of how these tangible things change with a rising or setting sun, how they smell and transform in thick fog, rain or sweltering heat. How time runs through all things. Through my body, I perceive the evidence and residue of this.

As a synesthetic, I am drawn to an artist's sensitivity to, and interpretation of, materials, because of the unique way I perceive my surroundings. Artists Jessica Stockholder and Tara Donovan transform material, present it as a new invention, and let it breathe a new life without it losing its original identity. The absurdity of a column of plastic baskets or a wall of straws comes to possess its own internal logic. I am also curious how an artist pursues, if not their sensitivities (or perceptions, like synesthesia), their own innate preferences or interests.

Eva Hesse for example. Her work is said to embody contradiction, "From early on, her work combines softness and hardness, opacity and translucence: that is pictorial and sculptural, two-dimensional and three, vertical and horizontal that it conjoins 'organic' form and industrial materials, order and disorder"⁶ This contradiction comes out of her curiosity with elements like paint and latex, plastic and paper mache, cotton string and wire, to name a few. "Aught" is one example of how Hesse uses material, (she doesn't have a 'medium,' per se). This piece is composed of rubber latex that, in its liquid form, was painted over eight rectangular

⁶ Sussman, Elisabeth. "Eva Hesse". San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002 p.60

canvases. She fused pairs of these latex covered rectangles together at the perimeter and stuffed each with filler to give it a wrinkled, airy look. The result is four, 78 x 40" rectangular forms that hang equidistant on a wall. The rubber seems to possess a heavy body, but is produced in a way to give a lofty, light feeling. In simple and subtle ways Hesse manipulates materials, making them her own.



FIGURE 4: Eva Hesse, *Aught* 1968

Hesse's sense of contradiction and interest in exposing material rawness is apparent, to a degree, in *Rescued from the Dustpan*, a collection of long white cat whiskers. They have been stitched into black velvet fabric. This is held tightly by an eighteen inch, raw-wood embroidery hoop. From the hoop, fabric runoff juts out in a haphazard cut, but square-ish nonetheless. This excess fabric spreads from the hoop on all sides, touching the wall, framing, and thus highlighting the hoop's lopsided circular shape. The whiskers have been situated inside the circle, slightly

off center. They were stitched in horizontal waves to resemble a quavering moonlight over the surface of a midnight ocean.



FIGURE 5: Lauren Kohne, *Rescued from the Dustpan* 2014

Plucked from the dustpan, these trash-bound whiskers were saved, one at a time. Separated from the living feline, they are preserved, for now, within an embroidery hoop: a common craft device. It facilitates an embroidery project typically made in the home; typically, too, it is a craft that falls under the umbrella of whiling. The black velvet hearkens kitschy “pop culture” velvet paintings. The material choice conflates so-called “found” art with craft. It plays, too, with the personal pet’s (and their promoter-owners) ubiquitous presence in mainstream American popular culture. The cat’s absence, however, is analogous to the absence

of the coffee in the filters; the cups void of their contents; the vacancy of the woman from her rocking chair.

Absence of the prime ingredient persists in, *Poured Them Myself*, a sculptural assemblage of hundreds of used coffee filters, pulled apart, shaped then sewn back together and pinned to a wall. This work conveys my relationship to objects that reflect an ever continuing, unfolding, process similar to the work of artist Franklin Evans. Matthew Farina, who studies art criticism and writing takes note of the open- ended aspect in Evans's work: "Evans grabs for material rawness but first demands a few moments to figure out what you're looking at."⁷ Here, horizontally blanketing the wall in ruffled, rolling peaks and valleys; shifting between deep, burnt umber pigments and dusted, earthy beiges, this piece presents a transformed version of a common, commercially produced material which at first, like Evans' work, may not be readily recognizable. Without the confines of a frame, it extends across the wall, breaks around corners, and gently touches the floor. It breathes a life of its own, letting the natural contours of the paper dictate direction and form. One can imagine this form traveling endlessly. These hundreds of filters, stitched quilt-like, were at one time used (for consumption) in a predictable order: One after the other, after the other, and so on. Now, like the pages of a diary scattered randomly over the floor, the piece strives to challenge the often-linear experience of time in which these cups of coffee (and the accompanying conversations, eggs, and newspapers) were enjoyed, or not.

⁷ Farina, Matthew. "Franklin Evans, 'eyesontheedge,' Sue Scott Gallery, Through April 15th"; artcriticism.sva.edu/?post=franklin-evans-eyesontheedge-sue-scott-gallery-through-april-15; Art Criticism and Writing MFA Program; School of Visual Arts; April 2012; Web.

Scattered more literally over the floor is *Bad Cups*, a collection of roughly three hundred “white” mugs. Removing them from their usual context, the mugs are placed right side up across the floor en masse. Beside the feet, the distance between eye and cup is greater than normal. From further back, distance draws attention to the formal qualities of the cups: their shapes, hues and physicality. Less attention is drawn to their function, of which there isn’t any.

Composed over the floor, their quantity and distance from the eye reduces the viewer’s ability to immediately identify what they are. The disruption could lead to disorientation, or an initial bout of mild anxiety, a feeling *The Newlywed* knows well. In, *Bad Cups: A search for the perfect shade of white*, our newlywed asks, when am I satisfied? When will the search be over? When will I stop being asked to look?



FIGURE 6: Lauren Kohne, *Bad Cups: A search for the perfect shade of white* 2014

CHAPTER 5

Value

The value of the things I've accumulated can only be measured by what they have taught me about being in the world. And because there is a transiency associated with someone else's junk, I have the privilege of letting go of them, after the documentation has been completed. That said, some items do hold sentiment, and I find them difficult to release, not unlike a child attached to their Mickey Mouse souvenir, or Whiteread's so-called "magpie" of stuff. I am a sentimental person. I still own all my stuffed animals. I still wear a t-shirt I have had since fifth grade. Over time, these and others have evoked - as these things often do - a melancholy comfort, and I find comfort in the gentle reminders (from my loved ones, from myself) that the need for stuff, while universal, should not hinder our hopes of one day being set free of these attachments. That said, in carrying these things with me I carry their weight; physical weight, psychic weight, and I bear the energetic wear and tear. The thought of separating myself from them often feels as realistic as the idea of separating color from the words I read.

Should a clean break or detachment from these things prove impossible, the questions - posed by the families of deceased hoarders around the world - are raised. How do (or should) we make sense of this? And what is next? Bad Cups pokes at this dilemma. Cristina Morozzi, journalist, art critic and curator speaks from this point of view emphasizing a demand to recognize and surrender to our inevitable fate; that we never outlive the object. She indicates however, that we may

live through it. “Maybe,” Morozzi says, “in the act of collecting objects from the recent and distant past there lurks the certainty that our things will outlive us, that they will speak about us even when we are no longer around. Our things will survive.”⁸

For a long time, I’ve shared Morozzi’s outlook, and I believe the assortment of raw materials that make up *The Newlywed* grapples with this problem; though, the more time I have spent with my rueful bride, I have found myself more and more open to the view that the emotional, psychological, and spiritual architecture, all that which is invisible, lasts at least as long as the material thing, and likely predates its creation as well.



FIGURE 7: Lauren Kohne, *dot, dot, dot* 2014

These simple daily movements etch themselves into her mind and body; making a bed, slipping her feet into a pair of socks, the creak of the floorboards as she paces room to room, the crackle of a sizzling egg on a pan. Replayed over and over, her recollections flash, invert, and twist, expressing her memories as a

⁸ Morozzi, Cristina. “Colors Magazine, issue no 79 Collector.” Distributed, Johnsons International News Italia S.p.A. Milan, Winter 2010/2011 p. 19

disjointed, albeit logical, fever dream. In recalling specific and isolated moments like these she finds herself and her body oddly distanced from them. Susan Stewart speaks to this bodily feeling of distance as being replaced by something alien or external to the body.

“In this process of distancing, the memory of the body is replaced by the memory of the object, a memory standing outside of the self and thus presenting both a surplus and a lack of significance. The experience of the object lies outside the body’s experience - it is saturated with meanings that will never be fully revealed to us. Furthermore, the seriality of mechanical modes of production leads us to perceive that outside as a singular and authentic context of which the object is only a trace.”⁹

Objects are out there, everywhere waiting for us to give them meaning:

On a small two, by two, by two inch black velvet jewelry box rests two, polished silver marriage rings, linked together and inscribed in the interior with an ellipsis on each ring. The box and rings are supported by a plant stand (or lamp stand) with obvious wear. The arrangement acknowledges the rings are as every day as a household plant. Now interlocked, and their function erased, they exist as a symbols of a relationship.

Nicolaides notes that in objects essences are embedded within, and people who had contact with them leave behind traces. These residues, we, the observers, are left to discover, use, and mold. In his words, “The man who made the chair was aware of the different needs of the people who would sit in it, and the chair reveals

⁹ Stewart, Susan. “On Longing. Narratives on the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection.” Duke University Press, U.S.A. 1993 p. 133

the mood or the character of the person who chooses it.”¹⁰ Present in Nicolaides’s teachings exists a conversation between the assertion of the artist and the artist’s acceptance of forces within and throughout his/her environment. Active components merge with roaming ghosts whose quiet influence commands the work. The insertion of a fictional character into the gallery space is my way of accepting that invisible forces are inevitably present. I converse with her, and introduce her as the protagonist of this body of work.

¹⁰ Nicolaides, Kimon. “The Natural Way to Draw.” Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, MA. 1941 p.5

CHAPTER 6

Time Passes



FIGURE 8: Lauren Kohne *Fifteen to Twenty Minutes* 2014

Fifteen to Twenty Minutes: A place to sit and while is unlike the other sculptures in the room. This piece is not comprised of a collection. A clock's tick is the only auditory enhancement, as the second hand twitches in and out of the space.

A wooden rocking chair, upholstered in bright blue, is set upon a small Turkish rug of bright reds and yellows. Hanging on the wall behind the chair is the

aforementioned embroidered clock. Time passes. Seconds that can be recorded, or mentally marked, go by. Juxtaposed against the abstract pieces surrounding it, *Fifteen to Twenty Minutes* is the only work which possesses a literal relationship with time, and the “normal” world. It is also the most linear in terms of narrative, while in itself reminiscent of the stage of a play between acts.

To capture time (for the purpose of containing it) is a fool’s errand, of course and, as years go by, its failure to be contained, and its stubbornness to allow for any exceptions, is the somber lesson *The Newlywed* is learning. The second hand’s dependable arrival is nothing more than a brief marker, a breadcrumb she will never be able to go back to collect.

Things remind us of the present and the past and a possible future, yet there is still an open-ended outcome. Many objects survive us no matter where they end up, whom they belong to, or what happens to them. Their mysterious histories change and become splintered from the original context in which they were born. In Hal Foster’s essay, *An Archival Impulse*, he argues archiving can be a means “to connect what cannot be connected.” Tacita Dean’s mixed media work, “recalls lost souls ... in a variety of mediums - photographs, blackboard drawings, sound pieces, and short films and videos often accompanied by narrative ‘asides,’ often drawn to people, things and places that are stranded, outmoded or otherwise sidelined”.¹¹

In her work Dean collects thrifted post cards and draws her own pasts and conclusions from the images she finds. This retelling has nothing to do with completeness. She is showing us open-ended strands of people’s lives and lost

¹¹ Foster, Hal. “An Archival Impulse.” MIT Press: October 2004 p. 3-22. Print p.11-12

adventures. Her work brings to mind Captain Ahab searching endlessly for his white whale in the mid-Atlantic fog. For Dean it is a lucid, fragmented essence of a story in history: A memory of a projected future that never happened.



FIGURE 9: Tacita Dean, *The Story of Minke the Whale* 2001



FIGURE 10: Tacita Dean, *Death Ship* 2001

Hal Foster observes, “The risk in [Dean’s] work is different: a romantic fascination with ‘human failing.’ But, within the ‘failed futuristic visions’ that she recovers archivally, there is also an intimation of the utopian - as a concomitant of her archival presentation of the past as fundamentally heterogeneous and always incomplete.”¹²



FIGURE 11: Lauren Kohne, *Looking for My Release* 2014

¹² Foster, Hal. “An Archival Impulse.” MIT Press: October 2004 p. 3-22. Print p.16

Where one history drops away, Dean steps in defining her version of it without necessarily finishing the story. The unknown becomes her subject. Ubiquitous, yet frequently sidelined (or stashed), keys, such as those in *Looking for My Release*; transcend their utilitarianism in a new context.

CHAPTER 7

Formal Strategies

When does a material find its home? How do these objects appear as they sit together in the gallery space? What is connecting them? Why do some sculptures have an open-ended quality while others seem to have a clear end point? Do I possess the right to change my sculptures on a whim? As I grapple with different questions and directions within my work and my art practice, I look to the artist Gabriel Orozco, who through his many contradictory methods succeeds in creating unity and poetry from piece to piece. He challenges his audience to resolve on their own terms the perplexing positioning and juxtapositions of his objects.

Orozco's studio practice happens inside closed spaces as well as in the streets. He encounters materials in his environment that he assembles and places outdoors, *Chair with Cane*. He takes impressions from the environment, *Yielding Stone*. He collects materials like ice cream spoons, lays them flat forming a giant cone shape on a hard cold gallery floor *My Hand is the Memory of Space*. He sculpts, draws, takes photographs, and writes. His work is shown both within the formal white walls of the gallery as well as against the backdrop of a grimy cityscape or dusty country expanse.

He requires his audience to write their own answers to his, sometimes puzzling combinations and configurations and/or subtle infiltrations of the environment. How would one decode a traditional chessboard full of only horse chess pieces?

Much like Hesse, he lets his materials be. A room full of blown tire parts laid across the floor are unaltered. Collections of rocks, drawings, yogurt caps, toy car, a shoe etc. are titled, Working Tables and are just that. Yet, he also fabricates works from beginning to end as with, Oval Billiard Table. He embraces approaches that are both methodical and (seemingly) instantaneous and whimsical.

Philosopher Fredric Nietzsche observed, "Only idiots fail to contradict themselves three times a day."¹³ As I've gained more experience, I've become more agreeable to embracing contradictory ideas and forms inhabiting the same space, because the tension between them creates a vibration more likely to propel me forward, than the perfect, settled, or stagnant idea (or ideal). Philosophy (like wisdom), after all, is founded on the acceptance of contradiction as a condition of the human state. I don't consider myself a philosopher, or even to be really wise, but this is my attempt at exploring (and acknowledging) the contradictions in my life, in my mind, and in the way I work. To not contradict myself in my work would be censorship.

¹³ Hugues, Scott. "OnlinePhilosophyClub.com" 2007-2011; Web

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

Salman Rushdie observes of the author Angela Carter, "... she opens the old story for us, like an egg, and finds the new story, the now-story we want to hear, within."¹⁴ In my own way I have chosen to reassemble the old - or discarded - and find in it an undiscovered structure or a new logic. My process is to seek the scraps, residues, and essences of materials that have been left behind, and the accumulation of these things create foundations in which to express internal questions. And so I contemplate the histories of these common, junked, and ephemeral, things. As I come understand the spectrum of their long lasting or fleeting lifespans, I step in to redefine, and interpret them in new personal ways. Artifacts, transformed or let be, do account for some stranger's (or my own) line in the ledger of the world, and they propel me (or us) to imagine and impress narratives which time will, inevitably, forget.

¹⁴ Carter, Angela. "Burning Your Boats." Penguin Books, New York, New York, 1995 p. xiv

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IMAGE OF THE ARTIST AT WORK

